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GRAPHIC ART OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

EXHIBITION OF PRINTS FROM THE
PRIVATE COLLECTION

OF

HENRY J. JOHN M. D.

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
CLEVELAND, OHIO, U. S. A.

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INTRODUCTION
and
BIOGRAPHICAL DATA
by
LADISLAV URBAN

Perhaps many lovers of graphic art, who have had no opportunity closely to study this subject, wonder what the various terms, common to print-collectors and graphic artists, mean, such as *etching*, *dry-point*, *aquatint*, *line-engraving*, *stipple-engraving*, *mezzotint-engraving*, *woodcut*, *lithography* and *colour-print*. The following is a brief attempt to explain these various terms.

transfer

The word *etch* is of Teutonic origin and it means *to eat* or *to bite*. Hence comes the word *etching*, the process of which is as follows: The etcher takes a copper-plate, polished on one side and covered with a thin coating of the so called *etching-ground*, a compound of asphaltum, resin, and wax. The etching-ground is then blackened with smoke and the artist draws his subject by means of a special needle, cutting lines through the film of the etching-ground to the surface of the copper-plate. Having his design completed he immerses the plate in a bath of acid which immediately attacks the naked metal. The heavier and darker lines need, of course, a longer exposure to the acid biting than lines of finer and more delicate character. The copper-plate, with the picture "eaten in", is then thoroughly cleaned and goes to the printing press. The printing of etchings is an art in itself requiring a considerable skill and is generally done by the etchers themselves.

The technique of *stipple-engraving* is very much like that of an etching, only that here the artist produces the various effects of light and shade by grouping the dots, eliminating from his picture entirely the drawing of lines.

When the artist with a needle scratches his design directly into the copper-plate without first laying the etching-ground and without using the acid we call this the *dry-point* technique, which is closely related to the *line-engraving*.

In *mezzotint* the well polished surface of the copper-plate is roughened by means of a toothed tool called a *rock*, which makes small hollows or dents in the metal. The imprint from such a grounded plate would be perfectly black. The artist has to scrape the ground to smooth out the rough places in the form of his subject and thus produce a mezzotint.

The *aquatint* is a process in which finely-powdered resin is dispersed over the copper-plate. By heating the plate to a certain degree the resin is melted and baked upon the metal, forming grains finer or coarser according to the finess or coarseness of the powder used. Thus acid may etch only between the grains of resin producing that peculiar effect which this method suggests in its name.

In the technique of *soft ground* (*vernis mou*) one uses a soft, greasy ground, the principle part of which is a fat that does not harden. On a plate which is covered by this ground, the etcher places tissue or other paper of a distinctive texture or a piece of silk which, by means of a roller, he presses down lightly. With soft or hard pencils he draws upon this paper or silk, which, in the places where he makes his marks, adheres more or less firmly to the plate. In removing this paper or silk covering, the etching-

ground is lifted with it in those places where lines have been drawn, baring the plate correspondingly while the rest of the etching-ground remains. The lines of a soft-ground show the texture of the superimposed material and have uneven edges.

A *colour-etching* is produced by the imprint from several plates, usually three in number, each plate being made just for a single color, or else from a single plate on which the different colored areas are inked in with brushes or stamps.

The art of *wood-engraving* or *woodcutting* consists in transferring the design to a woodblock and then employing the knife and gravers to cut and dig away the wood between the lines. The wood that is left untouched, prints. Thus wood-cutting and wood-engraving is the opposite of etching; in the former the lines rise from the ground (surface printing), while in the latter the lines are incised, etched into the plate, sunk below its surface (intaglio printing).

Lithography, or writing on stone, is a method of reproduction by which a drawing is printed from a slab of limestone. The printing surface is neither in relief nor sunk, as the process rests solely upon the mutually repelling reaction of grease and water. The drawing is done with a special ink or crayon, the greasy substance of which is readily absorbed by the porous stone, and all such places will repulse water while the rest of the surface will take it freely. The drawing will take the oily printers ink, but the moistened parts of the stone will repel it. Lithography was invented in 1796 by a Bohemian, *Alois Senefelder*, who was born in Prague on November 6, 1771.

ALEX, Adolf, J., (1890 —) is the pseudonym of Adolf Jelínek, born in Strmilov, Czechoslovakia. He was a pupil of Max Švabinský and, at one time, was a student at the Munich Academy of Arts. For subject matters he is concerned chiefly with the dramatic representations of characters. His prints, depicting life in the Army and Gypsy camps, are full of vitality and atmosphere.

BÍLEK, František, (1872 —) born in Chýnov, Czechoslovakia, is one of the foremost sculptors and woodcarvers of that country. After having completed his studies at the Prague Academy of Arts he went to Paris where he drew inspiration from the vast treasures of art. His subjects are of religious, mystic, and symbolic character, and are quite often drawn from the glorious epoch of the Bohemian Reformation. Not finding time enough to create all his dreams in stone and wood he produced the following sets of prints: *The Prayers — Our Father — Building the Temple of the Future* — and *The Path*. We have also his wonderful interpretation of *Calvary* in woodcuts, originally a monumental series of woodcarvings. Of the book illustrations we name merely those which he prepared for the special editions of the poems of his friends, Julius Zeyer and Otokar Březina.

BOETTINGER, Hugo, (1880—) born in Plzeň, Czechoslovakia, studied at the Prague Academy of Arts. Besides the oil paintings of allegorical subjects he devotes himself to caricature-drawings of prominent personalities.

BRAUNEROVA, Zdenka, (1862—) born in Prague, studied under Chittusi and later under Curtois in Paris. The artist is one of the first Czechoslovak etchers to treat her subjects in a modern style. Her prints depicting the picturesque corners of ancient Prague reveal the charms of a true etcher's method and vision.

ENGELMUELLER, Ferdinand, (1867—) who was born in Prague makes the centre of his interest the beauties of the plains along the river Labe. At times he wanders off to the Italian orchards or to the sombre City of Venice. A moody romanticism and a picturesqueness one can always find in all his plates.

KOBLIHA, František, (1877—) born in Prague where he studied at the Academy of Arts. To name the most important works of his we would mention the following: *Vision - Prague - Toward Morning - The Revengeful Melody - The Woman - Tristan - May - Moonlight Nights - Don Quixote* - and *Bookplates*.

KONÚPEK, Jan, (1883—) was born in Mladá Boleslav, Czechoslovakia. An artistic education was given to him at the Prague Academy of Arts. At present he is a professor of drawing at the State School of Crafts in Plzeň. The two volumes of *Western Bohemia's Barocco*, *The Hymns of the Night*, Etchings for Shakespeare's Hamlet, for Zorilla's Don Juan, for Erben's Boquet, and for Dante's Inferno deserve special attention. He illustrated also a number of books.

KUPKA, František, (1871—) born in Dobruška, Czechoslovakia, resides in Paris where he won fame as a painter and

artist of a high culture. One of the first graphic plates of his is the composition known under the name "*Les Fous*", in which he satirized the historical and social movements. Further he illustrated "*L'Homme et la Terre*" of Elysée Reclus, "*Érinnyes*" of Leconte de Lisle, and "*Lysistrata*" of Aristophanes. A French publication came out in Paris by L. Arnould Grémilly entitled "*Frank Kupka*" with illustrations by the artist himself.

LAUDA, Richard, (1873—) born in Jistebnice, Czechoslovakia. Southern Bohemia's landscapes depicted in his set of prints called "*From Southern Bohemia*" deserve attention.

LOLEK, Stanislav, (1873—) born in Palonín, Czechoslovakia, has shown special interest in woodland scenery and animal life. He was a pupil of Julius Mařák in Prague.

MAJER, Antonín, (1882—) born in Prague, lived later in the northeastern part of Bohemia, where he devoted himself to depicting the scenic beauties of the country, especially those which can be found along the banks of the Jizera River. The artist is active in the realm of etching and woodcut.

MYŠLBK, Karel, (1874 — 1915) born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, was a son of the famous Czech sculptor Joseph Václav Myslbek. For his oil paintings and for his etchings he chose melancholy themes from the lives of the emigrants, the blind, the proletariat, and so forth. An untimely death during the World War prevented the fulfilment of his artistic intentions.

PREISSIG, Vojtěch, (1873 —) born in Světec, Czechoslovakia, entered the State School of Arts and Crafts in Prague and spent also several years in Paris studying graphic arts with Schmid and Delaune of the École Colarossi. For a time he was with Marold and Mucha. Master of technique and of the peculiarities of the various styles of engraving, he published in Czechoslovakia the first book on the graphic technique, which is known in the United States under the title of *Colour Etchings* (New York). His graphic works are chiefly decorative in nature. At the present time he is the head of the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts at the Wentworth Institute in Boston.

SILOVSKÝ, Vladimír, (1891 —) born in Libáň, Czechoslovakia, began to study architecture in the Prague School of Technology, changing later to the School of Arts and Crafts. Max Švabinský was one of his master-teachers. Social struggles, the misery of war, various events of every-day life, scenes from the foundries, from the steel mills and from the mines, are a rich source of inspiration to this artist. His plates are often crowded with the figures of workingmen, old women, men, and hungry children; he makes us feel the ache of their limbs, stiff with fatigue, and to see the patience in their eyes.

STRETTI, Viktor, (1878 —) born in Plasy, Czechoslovakia, spent three years at the Prague Academy of Arts, finishing his studies in Munich, where he learned to etch under the guidance of Peter Halm. Besides many city and country views, figure studies, and landscapes, the three sets of his prints show Paris, the Thames River, and Ostende, as they appeared

to his visionary temperament. We have from him specimens of all the various techniques of etching with the exception of the woodcut. From Paris he brought to Czechoslovakia the French custom of New Year cards.

STRETTI-ZAMPONI, Jaromír, (1882 —) born in Plasy, Czechoslovakia, younger brother of Viktor Stretti, began his career as a bank clerk and later settled down to the life of an artist. Colour-prints are his speciality. Besides the views from Paris, Rouen, and Venice, ancient Prague attracts him with its manifold beauties, where he seems to find ever new and picturesque views.

ŠIMON, František, T., (1877 —) born in Železnice, Czechoslovakia, graduated at the Prague Academy of Arts. At the beginning of his artistic career he visited Southern Europe, where he interested himself especially in the Slavic countries: Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, and Montenegro. There his artistic temperament and his sense of beauty made ample use of the characteristics of Southern Slavs and the scenic beauties of their countries. After spending a few years in Italy and London he settled in Paris, where he remained until the outbreak of the World War. In Paris he devoted himself to mono- and polychrome etchings and became a member of the Société de la Gravure en Couleurs, of the Société des Peintres-graveurs Français, and of the Société de la Gravure sur Bois, as well as Secretary of the Salon d'Automne. Georges Petit in Paris published about 45 of his plates. Others were published by A. Roullier in Chicago, Fred Keppel in New York, Wed G. Dorens in Amsterdam,

and J. Štenc in Prague. Noteworthy are his etchings from the destroyed City of Rheims and his sets of prints called "Paris Motives" and "Hradčany" (Castle of Prague). The artist is a member of the Czech Academy of Arts and Sciences, the curator of the Modern Gallery in Prague, and one of the founders of "Hollar" — a society of Czech graphic artists. His prints show a most intimate knowledge of scenic beauty and a wonderful skill in depicting it. F. T. Šimon is one of the Czech artists who is best known on the foreign print-markets.

ŠVABINSKÝ, Max, (1873 —) born in Kroměříž, Czechoslovakia, graduated at the Prague Academy of Arts, where he is now the head of the Graphic School. Although he is first and foremost a painter, who knows how to catch with his brush the human likeness and to express his visions on large canvasses and surfaces, he today leads in the Czechoslovak graphic art. He might be called a graphic poet, an artist of lofty imagination and of high originality. Graceful etchings of trees and woodland scenery, landscapes of restful beauty, noble portraits, days and nights with their wonderful contrast of light and darkness, plates large or in miniature, bear unmistakably the mark of a genius. Magnificent are his sets of prints *In the Primeval Woods* and the *Paradise Sonata*, where gorgeous tropical vegetation, beautiful feminine nudes, butterflies, tigers, and strange birds appear at their master's command in proper time and in proper environment. Švabinský's plates mark the pinnacle in the evolution of the Czechoslovak graphic art.

TONDL, Karel, (1893 —) born in Krásno, Czechoslovakia, was a pupil of Jan Preisler at the Prague Academy of

Arts and later of Max Švabinský at the Graphic School. In 1920 he went to Paris on a traveling-fellowship granted by the French Government, where he acquired a deep knowledge of graphic art, especially of the woodcut. There he also held an exhibition of his etchings in the Société Nationale and the Artistes Français.

ÚPRKA, Joža, (1862 —) born in Kněždub, Czechoslovakia, is one of the most prominent Czechoslovak painters. Peasant folks in their picturesque national costumes, peasant life in general, and the beauty and brightness of country scenes entirely absorb his interest. While oil painting is this artist's real domain, his masterly draughtsmanship finds expression in the etching with its comparative coldness and lack of color.

VIK, Karel, (1883 —) born in Hořice, Czechoslovakia, interests himself chiefly in woodcut. Best known are his sets of prints entitled *In the Mountains* and *The Bohemian Paradise*.

VONDROUŠ, Jan, C., (1884 —) was born in Chotusice, Czechoslovakia. He came to United States with his parents, who emigrated to this country when he was nine years of age. His artistic education he obtained in four year's study under James D. Smillie in the schools of the National Academy of Design in New York. It is no wonder then that his colleagues from the Prague Art Society "Mánes" recognized him as a man belonging to the Anglo-American school. The artist, as a true etcher, is entirely absorbed in technical problems of etching. Ancient architecture appeals especially to his artistic sense, as can be seen from his numerous plates from Italy, Belgium, and Prague.

Last but not least are his prints with subject matter from the United States: the Library of Columbia University, fishermen's boats, the preparation of fish for the market, work in the ship yards, and so forth. During the World War he produced a series of prints entitled *Kulturtraegers*. The climax of his art, however, seems to be reached in his plates of Old Prague, whose dusky mysteries and beauties appeal to him with an abiding charm which is echoed by the refrain of an English ballad:

"Yet the persons I pity
Who know not the city
The beautiful City of Prague!"

WELLNER, Karel, (1875 —) born in Unhošť, Czechoslovakia, is a professor of drawing in Olomouc, Moravia. A large portion of his prints present the beauties of this city and its surroundings.

For the rest, it is my pleasant duty to thank Mr. František Zákavec, the art-critic of Prague, and Henry J. John, M. D. for various information and counsel, and also the Czechoslovak National Alliance of America for the financial aid which made this edition possible.

L. U.

Cleveland, Ohio, June, 1922.

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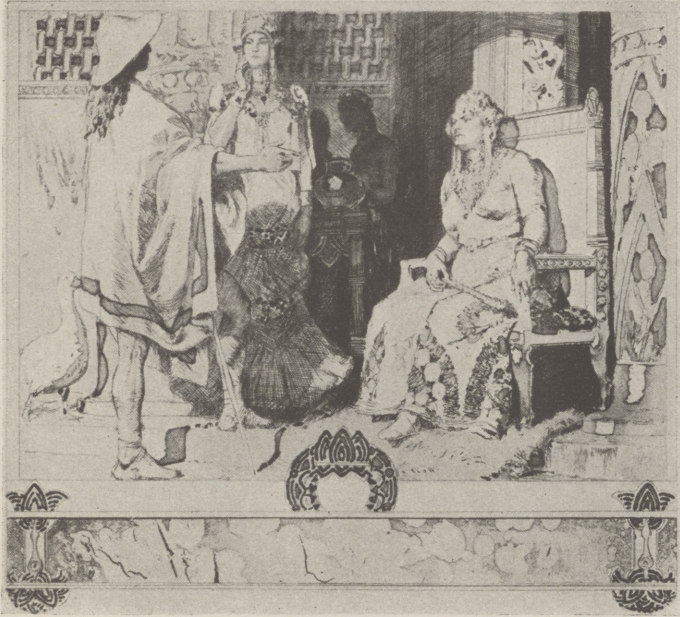
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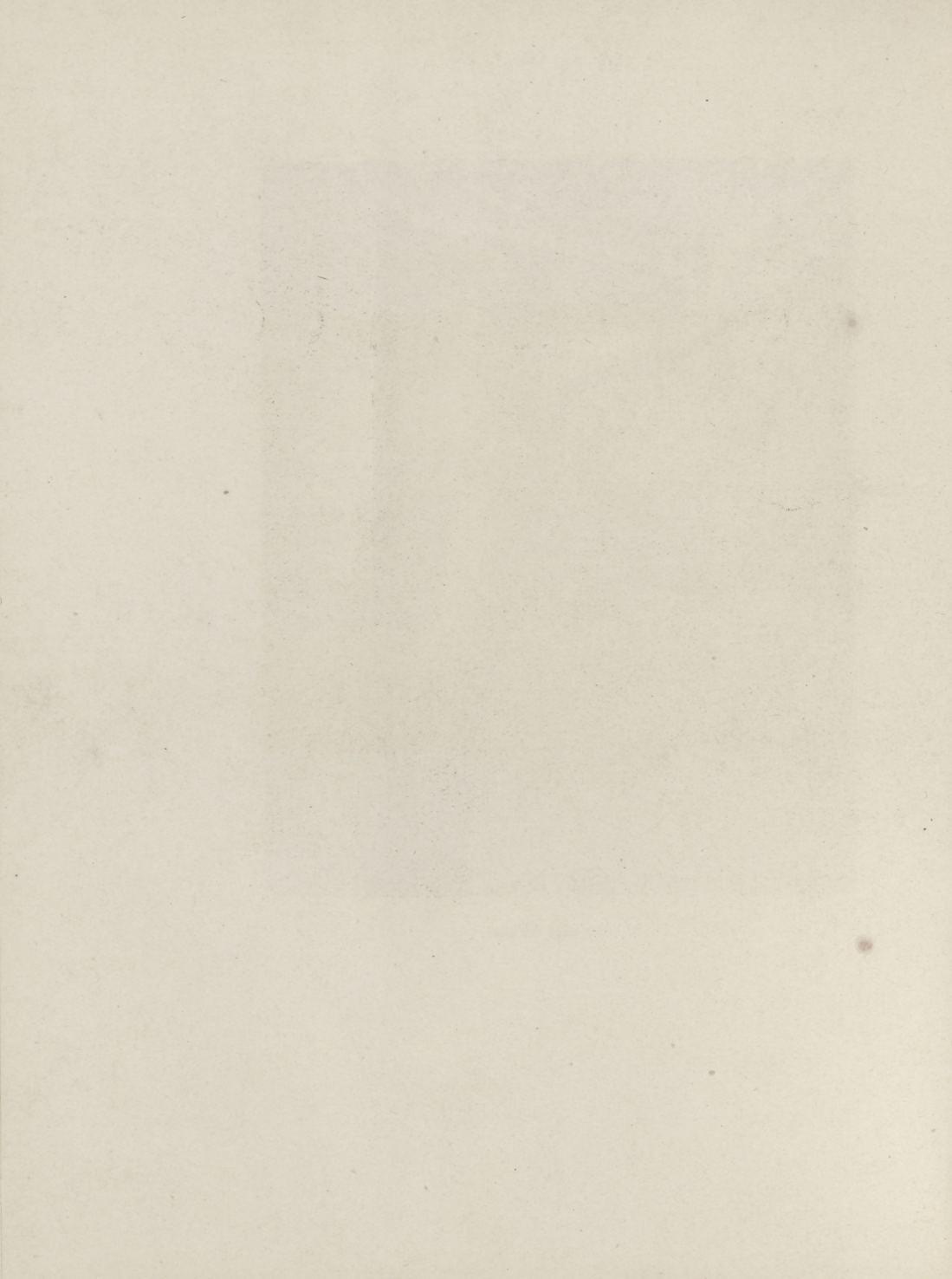
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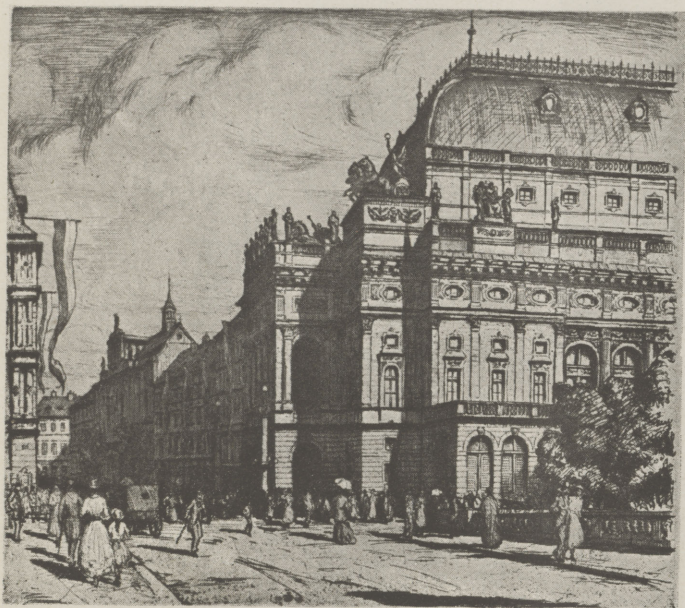




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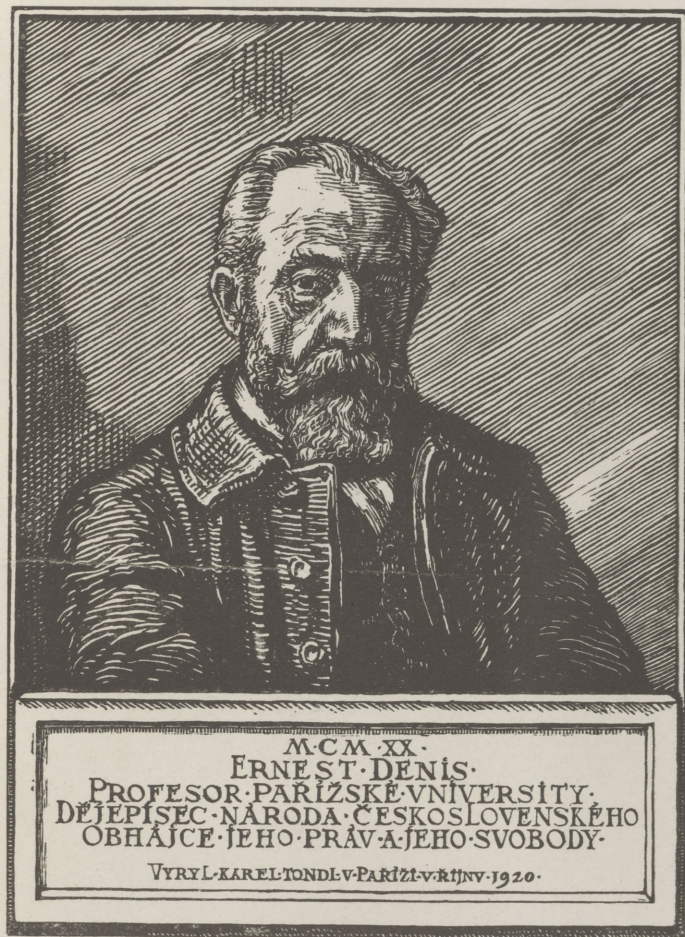
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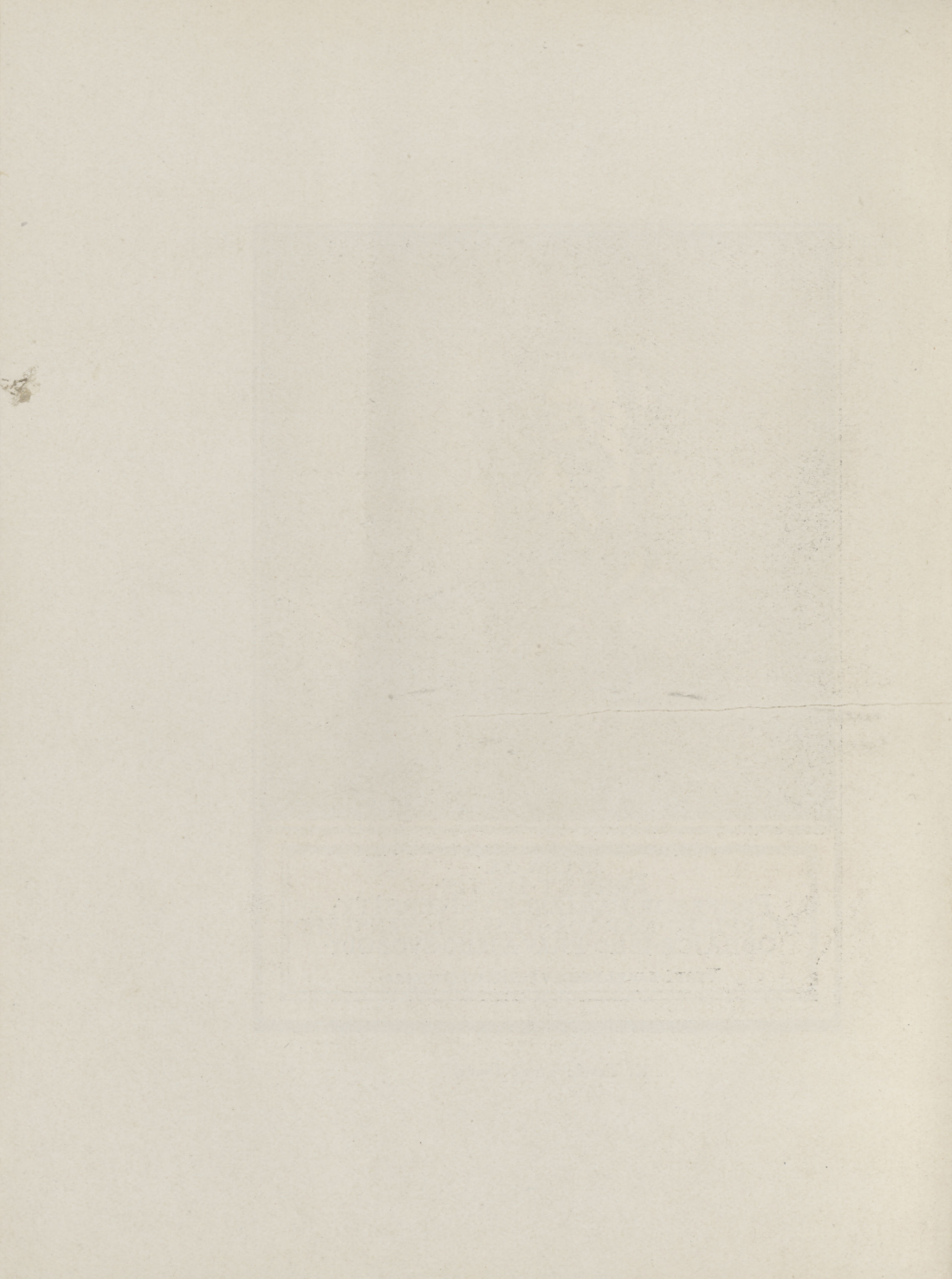
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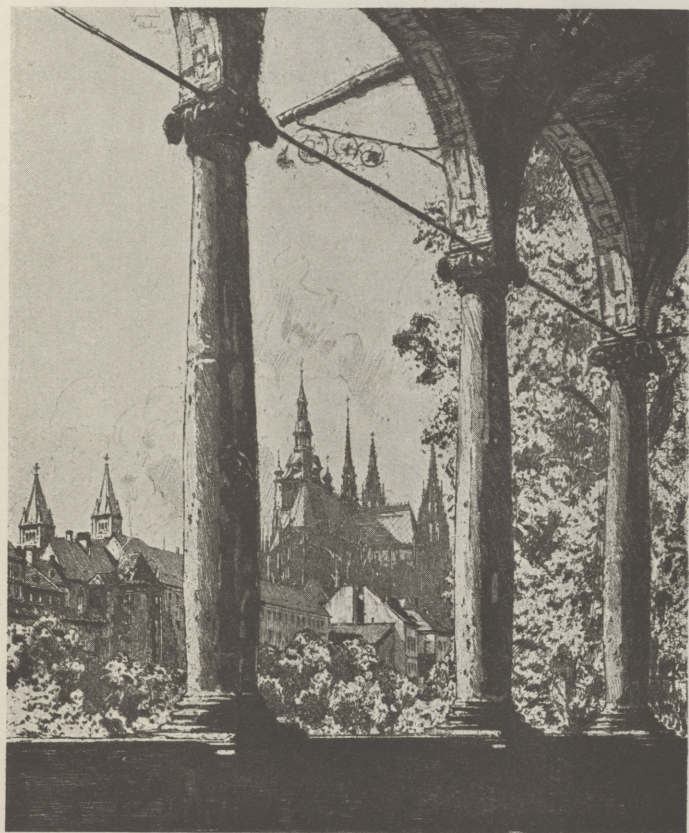


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